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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002006

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SUBJECT: DP PARTY CONGRESS: FANFARE FOR A COMMON MAN

¶1. (C) Summary: The center-right Democrat Party (DP), a former electoral powerhouse with a checkered history, held its national party congress on 15 November. The convention hall was packed, the participants energetic, and the incumbent chairman, Suleyman Soylu, was reelected easily with a message of impending change. Soylu failed, however, to offer concrete information as to how DP would be the party to effect that change. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Democrat Party held its party congress at Ankara's Ataturk Sports Hall on 15 November. The hall was packed with supporters from all over the country. Judging from the applause given to the names of the provincial party chairmen as their names were read, the best-represented provinces were those of western Anatolia: Denizli, Mugla, Afyon, Kutahya, and their neighbors. One delegate commented to us that Soylu had spent incredible amounts of money touring the country and drumming up participation for the convention. Soylu certainly did not skimp on the cost of posters. His portrait was ubiquitous and in epic proportions. One poster portrayed Soylu beneath a string of photos of the chairmen of DP and its precursor parties (including both the Justice Party (AP) and True Path Party (DYP)), reaching back to Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes (President and PM respectively when the army staged the 1960 coup), via Suleyman Demirel (Prime Minister during the 1971 coup and then President in the 1990s) and Tansu Ciller (Turkey's first female PM). Another banner read, "Our fellow countryman, the Magnificent Suleyman from the town of Of, has the Qu'ran in his hand and faith in his heart," not only in an attempt to bolster Soylu's credentials on the religious right, but also to draw a connection between Soylu (a native of Of, in Trabzon province) with both Suleyman Demirel, and Suleyman the Magnificent, one of the Ottoman Empire's most revered sultans.

¶3. (C) Soylu's arrival was greeted with thundering applause. He toured the floor of the sports hall for twenty minutes, shaking hands with a crowd straining and crushing to meet him. Soylu's opening speech was equally enthusiastic, involving deep-lung yelling of party slogans and optimistic pictures of DP's future. He was highly critical of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) for its policies that have, he claims, mired Turkey in "continuing corruption, unemployment, and poverty," and for its exploitation of religion for political ends. He was also sharply critical of the government for its perceived inaction on countering the PKK, blaming it, in part, for the KRG's inaction against terrorists. Soylu won the election easily with 992 votes out of 1003.

¶4. (C) Soylu's enthusiasm perhaps got the best of him. Twenty minutes into his speech, he suffered a drop in blood pressure; he became wan, listless, and confused. Attendants quickly brought him a packet of medicine, and, as Soylu sat recovering, a video of the history of the DP and its forerunners played to an enthusiastic crowd. The hero of the video was, perhaps surprisingly, Tansu Ciller, whose face produced thunderous applause, more so than Menderes or Demirel. Several DP supporters, at least one of them a delegate, professed an expectation that Ciller would come back to politics soon. The silence that greeted the image of Mehmet Agar, a former Interior Minister and Soylu's immediate precursor as chairman, was deafening. Soylu's recovery was complete, and he went on to speak at length with enthusiasm following the video.

¶5. (C) Comment: Soylu's enthusiasm and largesse may be a sign of desperation rather than confidence. He has been party chairman for eleven months; without an election victory in the March local elections, he will be expected to step aside like Mehmet Agar before him. However, his message, though full of sound and fury, failed to provide concrete details of how DP would win or what sort of policies it would enact to bring about change for the better. More telling was the support that Tansu Ciller still holds in the party as indicated by the thundering applause her name and image generated. She clearly holds sway with many of the delegates; Soylu needs to either rack up an impressive return in March elections or win over enough delegates that he cannot be easily sidelined. Otherwise, he will follow Mehmet

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Agar into silent obscurity.

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SILLIMAN